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Times Union

Fighting water poisons

Flint, Michigan. activists meet Hoosick Falls residents to share stories and strategies

By Kenneth C. Crowe II

Published 10:46 pm, Thursday, October 6, 2016

Hoosick Falls

Flint, Michigan, is 586 miles west of this village near the Vermont-New York border, but Thursday night their citizens were neighbors sharing stories of poisoned water and strategies to fight back.

Fear, pollution, uncaring officials and a dispassionate bureaucracy are familiar stories for the families from the industrial Michigan city and the New York village with its own manufacturing heritage.

"As a teacher in Flint, I've seen students come in with fear," said Darlene McClendon. The students still can't drink from the water fountains. McClendon was one nine people on panel that discussed the issues with an audience 60 people at St. Mary's Academy.

It's lead contamination in Flint. In Hoosick Falls, PFOA — perfluorooctanoic acid — polluted public and private wells in the village and the towns of Hoosick and Petersburg.

"Our government let us drink this water," said Michelle Baker of Hoosick Falls, one of the panelists. She filed a class action lawsuit against Saint-Gobain. The company's plant in the village has been identified as a source of the suspected carcinogenic PFOA.

Lead is known to cause many health issues, including brain damage. PFOA, which was used in the manufacture of nonstick surfaces, is suspected to cause cancer and other illnesses.

Many of the 60 people attending the panel presentation and public discussion at St. Mary's

Academy can tell you how high their PFOA contamination is by reciting the number from their blood tests. For some, it's not just a number.

"It's dirty water. We've all been poisoned," said Michaela Charron, an audience member who said she has seen her healthy life destroyed and now is undergoing cancer treatment.

For some, peace of mind is long gone.

"It's changed my reality," said Heather Allen, a panelist who said she feels the loss of familiar circumstance and surroundings and she now questions what's in her environment.

Clare Myers, a Hoosick Falls High School senior, said, "It's sad for me. I wish I hadn't grown up here because of the water."

But Myers is like the other panelists, from both Hoosick Falls and Flint. They've fought back. A press conference earlier this year by students like Myers and Stephanie Merwin, also on the panel, is credited with forcing Gov. Andrew Cuomo to intervene and assist the community.

"It's been a fight for my family. It's been a fight for village that I love," said panelist Laurene Hackett.

LaShaya Darisaw of Flint described bringing 500 people to Michigan's state capitol in Lansing to fight for justice.

"You voted them into office, therefore, they have a responsibility to Hoosick Falls," Darisaw said.

She said the support of unions helped make their campaign possible. Hoosick Falls activists cited support from the New York State Nurses Association. Among the panel sponsors was the New York State United Teachers, whose members have been active in raising awareness about PFOA.

The discussion drew elected officials and candidates. Republican state Assemblyman Steve McLaughlin of Schaghticoke was seated in the front. Congressional candidate Zephyr Teachout and state Senate candidate Shaun Francis, both Democrats, also attended.

Baker said work continues to fight PFOA's devastation in the communities. It may seem quiet now, she said, but she promised the residents haven't stopped fighting.

Water issues in Michigan, Hoosick Falls lead to show of solidarity

BY EMILY DEFECIANI

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6TH 2016

Water issues in Michigan, Hoosick Falls lead to show of solidarity

HOOSICK FALLS, NY (WRGB)--"Your immediate fear goes to your child that you're supposed to protect," said Flint, Michigan resident LaShaya Darisaw.

"That, we can relate to," said Hoosick Falls resident Loreen Hackett.

They live hundreds of miles apart, they didn't know each other before today, but they have more in common than they would like. Each day, these women from Flint, Michigan and Hoosick Falls, New York are forced to deal with the consequences of poisoned drinking water.

"Angry, it makes me feel angry because nobody deserves that, again nobody deserves that, no matter where you're from. Everybody should have access to clean water," Darisaw said.

They met Thursday to share how contaminated water has impacted their health, plummeted their property values, and pushed them to become activists, taking on the groups responsible for it all and calling on government officials to hold them accountable.

"They're wonderful, but it's sad that they're here, why they're here," Hackett said.

As parents, they gave a glimpse into how daily routines have changed, explaining that something like a bath has become a luxury.

"It takes 46 bottles of water to wash the average person's hair," Darisaw explained.

Another Flint resident said, "to fill up the bathtub with 16 ounce bottles of water, warming by running back-and-forth from the stove to the microwave to the bathroom, is a job within itself."

They also opened up, mother to mother, about feeling the guilt of not knowing that their children were being exposed to harmful chemicals.

"My child was breast-fed for 18 months because I felt like I was doing the best thing I could for him, and now knowing what his level is, I pretty much poisoned him," said a Hoosick Falls resident.

And though each are suffering, whether it be from lead or PFOA, they expressed the desire to support one another in any way they can.

"That human spirit is still with us, to want to help one another, short of not seeing it from our government, at least it's within the communities," said Hackett.

"My message to them is don't give up, and make your voices heard, not let your voices be heard, make them heard," said Darisaw.

Flint Mothers Travel from Michigan, Hear Hoosick Falls' Water Concerns

TWC News

By Tanja Rekhi

Thursday, October 6, 2016 at 10:53 PM EDT

It's often been said that it takes a village to raise a child. But sometimes it can take several villages.

Such may be the case for both Hoosick Falls, New York, and Flint, Michigan. Thursday night, mothers from both communities came together to discuss how to raise their children, knowing their water is contaminated.

"What's happening in Flint, what's happening here ... Why?" asked Flint resident Darlene McClendon. "Why do we have to put up with something that's a right? Clean water."

In Hoosick Falls, a local manufacturer is being held responsible for contaminating the water with PFOA, the man-made chemical linked to cancer. And in Flint, high amounts of lead leached into the public water supply after the city changed its water supply.

Both toxic chemicals were found in residents' blood.

"My daughter so far is the highest child I've seen," said local resident Emily Marpe. "She's 207 parts per billion at 11 years old; we've had some medical concerns."

"Luckily right now, the grandchildren have tested negative, I've tested negative, so have their mothers, but we don't know what the long-term effects are of this," McClendon said.

Hearing what Hoosick Falls was going through prompted these three Flint mothers to travel across the country to help, but what they heard weren't just stories of how to help the children.

"Now that we know your story, we will share your story as well," McClendon said.

WNYT

Flint, Mich. mothers impacted by tainted water meet with Hoosick Falls moms

October 07, 2016 12:06 AM

HOOSICK FALLS - "Those children that came to school with tears in their eyes asking am I going to die, am I going to get sick?" said Flint teacher Darlene McClendon.

Two groups of mothers from two different places.

Both have contaminated water in their communities.

"It was the biggest shock to myself and my family and neighbors to find out that our water like all of you in this room is contaminated by Saint Gobain," said Hoosick Falls resident Michele Baker.

A group called "The Mothers of Flint" from Flint, Michigan met with mothers from Hoosick Falls and nearby areas at St. Mary's Academy to talk about how the issue has impacted their lives Wednesday night.

High levels of lead caused a water contamination crisis in flint while PFOA is blamed or tainted water in Hoosick Falls and other parts of the state.

"Originally the town didn't want to waste the money fixing contaminated wells," said Petersburg resident Emily Marpe.

"Everyone was told to get blood tests for the lead," said Flint resident LaShaya Darisaw.

McClendon said she believes the water has caused learning disabilities in some of her students.

"I teach a skill, teach it several different ways using different strategies," she said. "They have it that day and a couple of days later, do an informal assessment and it's like you didn't teach anything," McClendon said.

Members of the community and elected officials also took part in the discussion.

Life-long Hoosick Falls resident Michaela Charron blames the contaminated water for her pancreatic cancer.

"I know it's because of the water," Charron said. "The local physician whose been on top of this says this is one of the cancers there's been an uptick in," she said.

Most in the room expressed anger at a slow government response in both places.

"We are the government," said Hoosick Falls resident Heather Allen. "We empower the government. We vote for who our government's going to be," she said.

"We know what you're going through and we hope it never has to happen to any community ever," McClendon said.

New Paltz Oracle

Safe Water Restored in Hoosick Falls

October 6, 2016

Matt Apuzzo

Many residents of Hoosick Falls were relieved to hear that their water was declared safe on March 30, 2016.

After a contamination scare began in August 2014, which intensified when the Environmental Protection Agency warned against using the water, most assumed that this ended the town's difficulties.

Hoosick Falls remained in the public spotlight as recently as last September, when efforts to assign blame for the situation created an impasse between three government agencies at the state and federal levels.

"The State Department of Health, as well as the Department of Environmental Conservation, are the ones primarily responsible in this case. The EPA also has a role," said Scott Minkoff, an assistant professor in SUNY New Paltz's political science department.

In early September, local newspapers and news stations reported that the contaminated areas in Hoosick Falls were proposed by the EPA to be reclassified as a "Superfund" site.

"Superfund sites usually get additional federal resources aimed at hazardous waste cleanup," explained Minkoff.

Government investigators agree that the source of the contamination was a plant owned by Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics. Specific contaminants found in the town's groundwater include dichloroethylene, vinyl chloride and perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA; the latter two are carcinogens and all three are hazardous to human life in some form.

Yet the town's representatives insist that the problem was worsened by government negligence, and that Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics isn't solely responsible.

"It took over a year for state officials to respond and tell the community not to drink the water. The state acted only after the EPA made a similar recommendation," said Minkoff. "The state is, in part, blaming the EPA for not being clearer about what its guidelines are."

In a crisis that lasted 19 months, required the coordination of water deliveries and containment procedures and contaminated the municipal water of an entire village, liability could prove to be highly damaging.

"The back and forth this time seems to be really focused on whether [the] State acted quickly enough and whether its delay was due to a slow response from the EPA," he added. "I don't have enough information to say who should or should not take responsibility, [but] I would say the shoving match between the state and the federal government does not look good."

Government branches and jurisdictions play a role where involved politicians place their loyalties. According to Minkoff, the mayor of Hoosick Falls supports the Department of Health because they are both a part of the state's Executive Branch. Meanwhile, federal representatives and senators have gotten involved by asking national agencies, such as the Center for Disease Control, to intervene in the situation.

In the struggle to hold government accountable for negligence, Minkoff said that one offender has been relatively ignored. "Very little attention has been placed on the plant itself and its responsibility in this matter. However, if there are lawsuits down the line they could be seeking damages from Saint-Gobain," he said.

The Intelligencer

Low amounts of PFCs in Upper Southampton; Northampton cries foul (PA)

By Kyle Bagenstose, staff writer

12 hrs ago

A pair of Thursday news releases from the Upper Southampton and Northampton water authorities will likely spell relief for some customers of the former, and raise concerns with those of the latter.

On Tuesday, this news organization filed a Right-to-Know request with the Upper Southampton Water and Sewer Authority seeking recent PFOA and PFOS testing results from the authority's two groundwater wells. Those documents, released by the authority Thursday morning, show the two wells contained 24 and 29 parts per trillion (ppt) of the chemicals when they were collected in July and August, respectively.

But those two wells only account for 20 percent of the township's water supply, which provides 1.2 million gallons a day to its customers, according to the authority. The other 80 percent comes from the Forest Park Treatment Plant in New Britain Township, by way of the Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority. Tests at the Forest Park plant have not detected any amounts of the chemicals.

According to a release from Upper Southampton, the well water and Forest Park water is mixed together before ever reaching customers' taps. A test of the combined water supply in July showed presence of the chemicals at 4.77 ppt.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's recommended limit for the chemicals is 70 ppt, meaning all results were well below the level the EPA says is protective of any health effects.

The 4.77 ppt sample was taken in July, while one of the two drinking water wells — the one that later showed 29 ppt of the chemicals — was offline. However, when averaging in the amount from that well found in August, calculations show about 5 ppt of the chemicals could be expected to be reaching customer taps, or only about 7 percent of the EPA limit.

Still, that's more than Northampton knew it was getting. A public announcement the Northampton, Bucks County, Municipal Authority sent Thursday morning stated the authority believes the water it has been receiving from the Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority — also about 80 percent of its total supply — was being mixed with water from Upper Southampton's wells before making its way into the Northampton system.

If true, and amounts of PFOA and PFOS exist in the water it is receiving from BCWSA, it could increase Northampton's burden: the system already has found the chemicals in 14 of 15 groundwater wells that it uses to provide the other 20 percent of water in its system.

According to the Northampton news release, that water authority has an agreement with Bucks County Water and Sewer to purchase 80 percent of its approximately 2-million-gallon daily demand from the pristine Forest Park plant. However, it says it was alerted earlier this week by Herb Schoell, the Upper Southampton manager, that the water is first being mixed with Upper Southampton wells.

"It has been brought to this authority's attention this week ... that waters originating from Forest Park and being commingled with the ground waters of public wells owned and operated by Upper South," the Northampton release stated.

The Northampton release says that the arrangement may be in violation of its agreement with BCWSA.

"The information from Upper South is a serious concern of this authority for two reasons," the release stated. "The (agreement) specifically states that our water is provided by Forest Park. The second is that because water is commingled and not from one source, we have no assurance that the water is up to quality expectations."

The release further states that the Northampton authority reached out to BCWSA for "an immediate explanation addressing these concerns," but to no avail.

"To date, Bucks Authority has been unresponsive," the release stated.

Pat Cleary, chief information officer with the BCWSA, disputes Northampton's claims, saying definitively that the water from Forest Park "does not commingle with Upper Southampton." He said he was also not aware of any attempts by Northampton to reach his authority.

"That's the first I've heard of it," Cleary said when asked about Northampton's claim.

Virginia Cain, spokeswoman with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, said her office was also not aware of any dispute but would be looking into it.

"DEP was not previously aware of any disputes between these systems. Upon notification, DEP's Southeast Regional Safe Drinking Water program is looking into these claims," Cain wrote in an email.

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